# How Forza Horizon 5 Put Accessibility into the Driver’s Seat

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Forza Horizon 5 took home several honors at the 2021 Game Awards, including the award for Innovation in Accessibility. The award is a great honor for Playground Games, who made accessibility one of the core pillars of the game’s design, and whose efforts have been rewarded with one of the highest accolades for accessibility in the gaming industry.

With at least 400 million disabled gamers worldwide, it is critical for entities in the gaming industry to continue to innovate and develop ways in which as many players as possible can enjoy video games the way they want to play them.

Playground Games set out to accomplish this in Forza Horizon 5 by making accessibility a key project initiative from the onset of development. They treated accessibility as a core game feature, and devoted a great deal of time and resources accordingly.

The team held many meetings and playtesting sessions with disabled players and advocates, attended events such as the 2019 London Game Accessibility Conference, and worked closely with the accessibility team at Xbox Game Studios to make sure the game would be designed in accord with the Xbox Accessibility Guidelines.

Image: Playground Games

By prioritizing and investing in these features from the start, Playground Games have ensured that Forza Horizon 5 is one of the most accessible games ever made, and that many key features and design aspects supporting accessibility would be available from the moment a player loads up the game at launch.

In fact, one seemingly minor but very important implementation in Forza Horizon 5 is the ability for the player to access the menu for accessibility settings immediately from the game's startup screen. This ensures that the player can apply key settings and preferences before any gameplay or cutscenes begin.

The options in the accessibility menu include many key features implemented in previous Forza Horizon games, but also several features which are new or have been further refined for Forza Horizon 5.

Colorblindness options, for example, can now be set separately for the user interface and for in-game elements, with sliders available for the latter. Additionally, key visual items such as map icons have distinct visual patterns so that color is not the only source of information a player uses to distinguish them.

Difficulty options have long been highly customizable in the Forza Horizon series, but Forza Horizon 5 adds a new difficulty setting called "Tourist." This mode adjusts the performance of AI cars during racing to effectively follow

that of the player, thereby ensuring a mode in which all players can truly race at their own pace. Consequently, the inclusion of this mode also ensures a means by which players at any skill level can progress through the game and unlock its content.

Forza Horizon 5 has also introduced a significant accessibility improvement for blind players, applying in-game driving assists not just to races but also to the open world map, as long as a waypoint is set. When used in conjunction with the game's narrated menu options, this system provides blind players greater access than ever before to navigate the game's enormous map and enjoy the plethora of content within the game.

Additionally, the game features a novel range of options related to features such as game speed and appearance of subtitles. The latter is especially exemplary of Playground's efforts in taking lessons learned from a feature of Forza Horizon 4 which was vastly improved throughout that game's lifetime, and applying these lessons to Forza Horizon 5 from day one.

Forza Horizon 5 has many other new and returning accessibility features, and yet it is by no means complete in terms of the features that could still be added to improve accessibility. Much like with their previous titles, Playground Games will continue to dialogue with experts and advocates for accessibility, and will continue to add and refine accessibility features and design aspects during the game's lifetime.

One particularly innovative feature which has been announced, and is forthcoming as of the timing of this blog, is the inclusion of sign language interpreters for American Sign Language and British Sign Language. When the corresponding option is selected, an interpreter will appear in a picture-in-picture display for all of the game's scripted cutscenes.

The release of Forza Horizon 5 comes at a time when accessibility and inclusiveness in video game design have seen unprecedented focus throughout the industry, from major AAA studios to publishers like Xbox Game Studios to independent developers of highly accessible games like HyperDot and The Vale: Shadow of the Crown. By virtue of Playground Games devoting monumental efforts and resources toward accessible game design, they have ensured that Forza Horizon 5 stands out as one of gaming's most accessible entries ever, and will influence the industry to continue to improve the ways in which players can access the games they want to enjoy.

When receiving the 2021 Innovation in Accessibility award, Forza Horizon 5 creative director Mike Brown echoed a quote made popular throughout Xbox in the past few years- "When everyone plays, we all win." By putting accessibility in the driver's seat, the team behind Forza Horizon 5 have

shown the power of this quote in action- and earned themselves a well-deserved victory lap.